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**Testimony of Jennifer Buchanan of Bridgeport in support of HB 5724  
Planning and Development Committee Public Hearing  
Wednesday, February 13, 2013**

Thank you for allowing me to speak in favor of Bill HB-5724.

The City Charter of Bridgeport states no city employee may serve on the City Council. Over the years, when citizens have petitioned the city to adhere to the charter, the city attorney has stated the current state law supersedes the city charter.

Bridgeport has no independent board of finance to oversee our half billion (plus) budget, half of which is State and Federal dollars you send to us. Bridgeport merged the board of finance duties into the City. I ask you amend this current statute so we, the citizens of the city of Bridgeport, and other cities in the state of CT can have our elected officials adhere to our city charters and practice good governance.

When a person is an employee of a city the mayor is their boss. The mayor presents the budget and the city council votes to approve the budget. A person who is elected to office is, in theory elected to serve the best interest of the citizens. It is a very real conflict of interest when every vote cast is over seen by your boss, the mayor. It is never good practice to have an employee be in a position to vote on their salary, benefits or department budget. I have no choice but to pay taxes to support the services the city of Bridgeport provides. I want to have the assurance that my tax dollars are allocated by an elected official who has no real or perceived financial benefit to the outcome of a budget.

There is no pay for being an elected City Council representative in Bridgeport. I cannot imagine anyone being torn between giving up their city job in order to serve on the city council. There are many city boards and commissions city employees can serve on, which would give them the ability to exercise their rights and voices in city government, without any conflict of interest with the City Charter.

I was here last year with a group of citizens asking you to enact a statute to regulate massage parlors; I am so very grateful to you, you listened and passed that state Statute. Bridgeport closed their massage parlors, and we close them every time they attempt to re-open - it is not business as usual in Bridgeport because of your support.

I am here again to ask you to please change this state statute so we can have a city that can continue to do the right thing, and work towards being a city of which we can be assured our elected officials serve only the best interest of the citizens of the city. There is a large number of qualified citizens of this city who have indicated they want to serve as City Council members, but will not consider serving with city employees who are council members.

Jim Finley, the CEO of CT Conference of Municipalities has publicly stated in newspapers he is opposed to this bill. What I hope he will also disclose to you is his company has a financial contract with the city of Bridgeport as a paid lobbyist. I hope he will also tell you he does not live in Bridgeport and has no direct experience as a resident with our perceived or real conflict of interest reputation, and that he has worked mostly with city employees, who have also publicly stated they have a vested interest in seeing this bill defeated.

Please help us to change this state statue, while it has a very good and valid reason to be a law, it does have that little wording issue that has become a big loop hole cities in this state have used to enact practices that do not serve their citizens best interest.

Thank you.

Jennifer Buchanan